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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUALA LUMPUR 000419

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SUBJECT: IRAQ: MALAYSIA FOREIGN MINISTER CONSIDERS VISIT TO BAGHDAD

REF: KUALA LUMPUR 381 - PAKISTAN INITIATIVE

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Mark D. Clark, reasons 1. 4 (b and d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Malaysia's Prime Minister Abdullah asked his Foreign Minister, Syed Hamid Albar, to visit Baghdad, according to the Iraqi embassy. The Iraqi charge hoped the U.S. quietly would encourage his government to respond quickly with a formal invitation. The Iraqi charge advised Baghdad to provide contracts to politically-connected Malaysian firms in order to restart the Iraq-Malaysia economic relationship. Two recent Iraqi parliamentary delegations to Malaysia boosted relations and featured Malaysian acknowledgments of the Iraqi government's legitimacy. Separately, the Afghan embassy could not confirm rumors of Foreign Minister Hamid's alleged intention to visit Afghanistan. We have yet to hear from Malaysian government sources regarding a mission by the Foreign Minister to Baghdad, or Kabul, but such visits would be in keeping with Malaysia's increasing foreign policy focus on the Middle East. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar told visiting Iraqi parliamentarians in late February that he was considering a visit to Baghdad, Iraqi Charge Hoshiar Dazayi told polchief during a March 1 meeting. Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi had asked Hamid to go to the Iraqi capital, but the details needed to be worked out by the two countries. Hoshiar said the he had communicated Hamid's comments directly to the Iraqi Foreign Minister in an effort to generate a formal invitation. The Iraqi Charge thought the visit could be built around a meeting of the existing (but moribund) Iraq-Malaysia Joint Commission, a format that Malaysia often utilizes in its bilateral relations (most recently with Syria). Hoshiar described the Iraqi Foreign Ministry as in shambles and voiced his concern that his government would not respond in time to Malaysia's stated interest in a visit. He asked for the U.S. to draw attention quietly to this issue in its contacts with the Iraqi government to increase the chances that a formal Iraqi government invitation for the Malaysian Foreign Minister would be forthcoming.

¶3. (C) Malaysia had made it clear that it would not open an embassy in Baghdad any time soon because of security concerns, Hoshiar said. Nevertheless, Hoshiar wished to rebuild an economic relationship and had advised Baghdad to offer business contracts in relatively stable areas to Malaysian firms, particularly to those connected with important officials, including Foreign Minister Syed Hamid.

¶4. (C) The two Iraqi parliamentary delegations in February had a positive impact on Iraq-Malaysia relations, Hoshiar commented. For the first time, Hoshiar heard Malaysian

officials acknowledge the legitimacy of the elected Iraqi government. The visits provided Hoshiar with opportunities to engage with the Foreign Ministry which heretofore had not had much time for him. Less positively, some Iraqi delegates provided a negative outlook on Iraq and much disinformation. Hoshiar thought it important for Malaysian optics that the U.S. was not associated with either visit. The UN assistance mission in Baghdad together with the Friedrich Naumann Foundation sponsored the larger delegation of some 25 Iraqi parliamentarians, which was intended to gather ideas for Iraq's constitution. The Iraqi government reportedly funded the second delegation consisting of two deputy speakers of parliament, which discussed political issues. The Iraqi delegates were primarily Shi'a, and Hoshiar hoped to involve other groups in the future. (Comment: The Ambassador heard the Foreign Minister remark that he was furious the Friedrich Naumann Foundation had used a minor pro-government political party, Gerakan, to carry out the visit. We presume that the Minister favored the dominant UMNO party for this task. End Comment.)

¶15. (C) Separately, we heard rumors of Foreign Minister Hamid's possible travel to Kabul. When contacted, the Afghan embassy told us they also had heard rumors, but had received no information from their capital or from the Malaysian government.

¶16. (C) Comment: We have yet to hear from Malaysian government sources regarding a visit by the Foreign Minister to Baghdad or Kabul. Such missions, if they come about, would be in keeping with Malaysia's increasing foreign policy focus on the Middle East, including its January deployment to UNIFIL, late February visits by the Prime Minister to Syria and Yemen, Deputy Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak's travel to

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Saudi Arabia in February, and Malaysia's participation in the Pakistan-led initiative (reftel).  
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